

## **THE EFFECTIVENESS OF BEHAVIOR CONTRACT-BESED GROUP COUNSELING IN REDUCING TRUANCY AMONG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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### **Abstract**

*This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of behavior contract-based group counseling in reducing truancy behavior among junior high school students. A quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed. The participants consisted of 11 seventh-grade students identified through a needs assessment as having high levels of truancy. Data were collected using a validated truancy behavior questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test. The results showed a decrease in the mean truancy score from 66.73 in the pretest to 54.18 in the posttest, with a Z value of  $-3.059$  and a significance level of  $0.001$  ( $p < 0.05$ ). These findings indicate that group counseling integrated with behavior contract techniques is effective in reducing truancy behavior. The novelty of this study lies in applying a structured behavioral contract within group counseling in an Islamic junior high school context.*

**Keywords:** *Group counseling, behavior contract, truancy behavior, school counseling.*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji efektivitas layanan konseling kelompok berbasis behavior contract dalam menurunkan perilaku membolos siswa SMP. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain pra-eksperimen one-group pretest-posttest. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 11 siswa kelas VII yang teridentifikasi memiliki tingkat perilaku membolos tinggi melalui asesmen kebutuhan. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan angket perilaku membolos yang telah diuji validitas dan reliabilitasnya. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan uji Wilcoxon Signed-Rank. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan penurunan skor rata-rata dari 66,73 (pretest) menjadi 54,18 (posttest), dengan nilai  $Z = -3,059$  dan  $p = 0,001$  ( $p < 0,05$ ). Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa konseling kelompok dengan teknik behavior contract efektif dalam mengurangi perilaku membolos. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada integrasi teknik kontrak perilaku dalam layanan konseling kelompok pada konteks SMP Islam.

**Kata Kunci:** konseling kelompok, behavior contract, perilaku membolos, layanan BK, siswa SMP

## INTRODUCTION

Truancy among junior high school students has increasingly emerged as a complex educational issue that undermines school effectiveness, student development, and the broader objectives of formal education. Truancy is generally understood as repeated or unexcused absence from school or classroom activities and has been widely linked to academic underachievement, behavioral maladjustment, and psychosocial difficulties (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Jiang et al., 2025; Kearney, 2008; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Walters, 2025). During early adolescence, truancy should not be interpreted merely as a problem of attendance; rather, it reflects deeper challenges related to learning motivation, self-regulation, peer influence, and students' capacity to adapt to school demands and environments (Santrock, 2003, 2018; M. Te Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Empirical evidence consistently indicates that students who frequently engage in truancy are more vulnerable to long-term negative outcomes, including academic failure, school dropout, delinquent behavior, and emotional disturbances in later stages of development (Gottfried, 2014; Maynard et al., 2012, 2014).

The issue of truancy becomes particularly salient at the junior high school level, which represents a critical transitional period from childhood to adolescence. At this stage, students undergo rapid biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional changes while simultaneously encountering increased academic expectations and social pressures (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Steinberg, 2011). Within the Indonesian educational context, truancy among junior high school students has been repeatedly identified as a recurring concern in school-based guidance and counseling practices, especially in institutions that lack systematic preventive and intervention programs (Masrukhin, 2025; Prayitno dan Erman Amti, 2019; Yusuf, 2012). National reports and school-level studies suggest that truancy often begins in the early grades of junior high school and, when left unaddressed, may evolve into chronic absenteeism and sustained disengagement from learning activities (Sukmadinata, 2019; Suryadi S., 2017).

From psychological and educational perspectives, truancy behavior is shaped by the interaction of multiple contributing factors. Individual-level determinants include low academic motivation, weak self-control, learning boredom, and negative attitudes toward school (Skinner, 1965, 2014; Zimmerman, 2021). School-related influences encompass peer pressure, classroom climate, instructional practices, and the quality of teacher–

student relationships (H. Wang et al., 2024; Wentzel, 2012). In addition, family-related conditions such as limited parental supervision, ineffective communication patterns, and socio-economic stressors further increase the likelihood of students skipping school or classes (Bronfenbrenner, 2021; Hill & Tyson, 2009). These interrelated factors indicate that truancy should be conceptualized as a multidimensional behavioral phenomenon rather than a simple disciplinary violation.

Given the multifaceted nature of truancy, contemporary scholars emphasize the necessity of intervention strategies that move beyond punitive approaches and instead prioritize behavioral change, student engagement, and supportive counseling services (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Maynard et al., 2012). School-based guidance and counseling programs occupy a strategic position in addressing truancy by offering structured and developmentally responsive interventions tailored to students' needs ((Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; Masrukhin & Musfiroh, 2021). Among various counseling modalities, group counseling has been widely acknowledged as an effective approach for addressing students' behavioral and social difficulties, particularly during adolescence (Corey, 2017; Gazda et al., 1967). Through group interactions, students are able to share experiences, receive peer feedback, and develop adaptive behaviors within a supportive social framework.

Behavioral counseling approaches grounded in behaviorist principles have demonstrated considerable effectiveness in modifying maladaptive student behaviors. Behaviorism emphasizes observable behavior change through reinforcement, commitment, and clearly defined behavioral expectations (Skinner, 1965). One practical technique derived from this approach and frequently applied in school counseling contexts is the behavior contract. A behavior contract refers to a written agreement between students and counselors or teachers that explicitly outlines expected behaviors, reinforcement procedures, and consequences (Kazdin, 1975, 1981, 1989). Prior research has shown that behavior contracts can significantly improve student attendance, task completion, and classroom conduct when implemented systematically and collaboratively (Cooper et al., 2007; Gresham et al., 2001)

The integration of behavior contracts into group counseling settings offers additional benefits. The group environment provides social reinforcement, peer accountability, and opportunities for observational learning and behavioral modeling,

which are particularly influential during early adolescence (Bandura, 1977a, 2010; Corey, 2017). International studies have reported positive outcomes of group-based behavioral interventions in reducing truancy and enhancing school engagement (Maynard et al., 2012; Sutphen et al., 2010). Similarly, national research in Indonesia indicates that counseling interventions grounded in behavioral principles contribute to reductions in disciplinary problems and improvements in students' compliance with school regulations (Putrawijaya, 2019).

Despite the growing body of research on truancy interventions, several gaps remain evident. *First*, much of the existing literature focuses on individual counseling or school-wide programs, while relatively few studies examine the combined application of group counseling and specific behavioral techniques such as behavior contracts (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Maynard et al., 2014). *Second*, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of such integrated interventions within Islamic junior high school settings in Indonesia—particularly in rural or semi-rural contexts—remains limited. Educational and cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping student behavior, and interventions proven effective in one setting may not be directly transferable to another (Bronfenbrenner, 2021; Eccles & Roeser, 2011). *Third*, many studies emphasize outcome measurement while providing limited discussion of the practical implementation of counseling interventions in real school environments with constrained resources.

Accordingly, further empirical investigation is needed to examine school-based counseling interventions that are developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and practically feasible for school counselors. Addressing this gap is essential for strengthening the preventive and corrective functions of guidance and counseling services in reducing truancy at the junior high school level. Specifically, research is required to explore how group counseling integrated with behavior contract techniques can effectively reduce truancy behavior among early adolescents within the Indonesian educational context.

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to examine the effectiveness of group counseling services employing behavior contract techniques in reducing truancy behavior among junior high school students. The independent variable is group counseling integrated with behavior contract techniques, while the dependent variable is students' truancy behavior. Using a quantitative approach with a pre-experimental one-

group pretest–posttest design, this study compares students' truancy behavior before and after the intervention. By focusing on students identified through a needs assessment as having high levels of truancy, this research seeks to provide evidence-based insights into the practical application of behavioral counseling interventions in school settings.

In summary, although previous studies have addressed truancy through various counseling and behavioral approaches, only a limited number have specifically investigated the integration of group counseling and behavior contract techniques within junior high school contexts, particularly in Indonesian Islamic schools. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by empirically examining the effectiveness of such an integrated intervention. The objectives of this research are to examine changes in students' truancy behavior before and after participation in group counseling with behavior contract techniques and to provide empirical support for the implementation of structured behavioral counseling interventions within school-based guidance and counseling services.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental design, specifically the one-group pretest–posttest design (Cresswel, 2010). This design was selected to examine changes in students' truancy behavior before and after the implementation of a structured counseling intervention. The design can be represented as follows:

$$O_1 - X - O_2$$

where  $O_1$  denotes the pretest measurement,  $X$  represents the group counseling intervention using behavior contract techniques, and  $O_2$  indicates the posttest measurement.

This design was considered appropriate because it allows for direct comparison of behavioral changes resulting from the intervention within the same group of participants, particularly in school settings where control groups are difficult to establish (Fraenkel, J. R., Wallen, N. E., & Hyun, 2012).

## **Participants and Research Setting**

The participants of this study consisted of 11 seventh-grade students enrolled at SMP Islam Gumukmas, Indonesia. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the results of a preliminary needs assessment conducted by the school counselor. The selection criteria included students who demonstrated frequent truancy behavior, such as skipping classes without permission or being absent from school repeatedly.

The research was conducted during the second semester of the academic year, within the natural school setting to ensure ecological validity and minimize disruption to routine educational activities.

## **Variables of the Study**

The study involved two main variables. The independent variable was group counseling integrated with behavior contract techniques, while the dependent variable was students' truancy behavior. Truancy behavior was operationally defined as students' unexcused absence from school or classroom activities and was measured quantitatively using a self-report questionnaire.

## **Research Instrument**

Data were collected using a truancy behavior questionnaire developed based on theoretical and empirical indicators of truancy behavior. The instrument initially consisted of 38 items measured on a Likert scale. Following item analysis, 27 items were retained as valid and used in the final analysis (Rensis Likert, 1932).

The instrument was subjected to validity testing using item-total correlation and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure measurement accuracy and consistency.

**Table 1 .** Summary of Instrument Validity and Reliability

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.877	15

## **Intervention Procedure**

The intervention was implemented through six structured group counseling sessions, each lasting approximately 45 minutes. The counseling sessions were facilitated

by the school counselor and followed systematic stages, including group formation, problem identification, behavior contract formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

**Table 2.** Core Components of the Behavior Contract

<b>Component</b>	<b>Description</b>
Target behavior	Attending all scheduled classes without unexcused absence
Participants	11 students identified as high-risk for truancy behavior
Contract duration	Two weeks
Counseling setting	Group counseling sessions
Behavioral commitment	Agreement to comply with school attendance rules
Reinforcement strategy	Verbal praise and counselor feedback
Monitoring method	Daily attendance checklist
Agreement mechanism	Written agreement signed by students and counselor
Evaluation	Comparison of pretest and posttest scores

The behavior contract was collaboratively developed between the counselor and students, specifying target behaviors related to attendance, reinforcement strategies, and agreed-upon consequences. This collaborative process was intended to enhance students' commitment and responsibility toward behavioral change.

**Data Collection Procedure**

Data collection was conducted in two stages. The pretest was administered prior to the intervention to measure students' baseline truancy behavior. After completion of all counseling sessions, the posttest was administered using the same instrument to assess changes in truancy behavior following the intervention.

**Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 26.0. Prior to hypothesis testing, data were examined for distribution characteristics (Field, 2013; Pallant, 2020). As the data did not meet the assumption of normality, a non-parametric statistical test was employed.

The hypothesis was tested using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, which is appropriate for comparing two related samples when the data are not normally distributed.

The decision criteria were as follows:

*If  $p < 0.05$ , the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected, indicating a significant difference between pretest and posttest scores.*

*If  $p \geq 0.05$ , the null hypothesis is accepted.*

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants' identities were kept confidential. The intervention was conducted solely for educational and developmental purposes without causing psychological or academic harm to the participants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULTS**

This section elaborates the empirical findings of the study and discusses their meaning in relation to theoretical frameworks and previous research on truancy and school-based counseling interventions. The discussion integrates quantitative results with behavioral and developmental perspectives to clarify how and why group counseling services incorporating behavior contract techniques contribute to the reduction of truancy behavior among junior high school students.

#### **Presentation of Main Findings**

The results of this study demonstrate a noticeable reduction in students' truancy behavior following participation in group counseling sessions integrated with behavior contract techniques. Descriptive analysis indicates a substantial decline in mean truancy scores from the pretest to the posttest, suggesting an overall improvement in students' attendance-related behavior after the intervention was implemented.

As shown in Table 3, the mean pretest score was 66.73, reflecting a relatively high level of truancy behavior among participants prior to the intervention. Following the

counseling program, the mean posttest score decreased to 54.18, indicating a meaningful reduction in truancy behavior.

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics of Pretest and Posttest Truancy Scores

Measurement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Pretest</i>	11	66.73	2.83	64	70
<i>Posttest</i>	11	54.18	4.92	47	62

The pretest results, obtained through an initial needs assessment, reveal a relatively homogeneous distribution of high truancy scores. This homogeneity indicates that the selected participants shared similar levels of truancy behavior prior to the intervention, thereby strengthening the internal validity of the comparison. In contrast, the posttest scores exhibit a lower central tendency accompanied by greater variability. This pattern suggests that while most students experienced improvement, the extent of behavioral change varied across individuals.

Before conducting inferential analysis, assumption testing was performed. The normality test results indicate that the pretest data did not meet the assumption of normal distribution, whereas the posttest data were normally distributed.

**Table 4.** Normality Test Results

Measurement	Statistic (W)	Sig. (p)	Normality Decision
<i>Pretest</i>	0.854	0.049	Not normal
<i>Posttest</i>	0.981	0.971	Normal

Given the violation of normality assumptions in the pretest data, a non-parametric statistical procedure was selected. Accordingly, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was employed to compare pretest and posttest scores. The test results, presented in Table 5, reveal a statistically significant difference between the two measurements.

**Table 5.** Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test Results

Statistic	Value
N	11
Z	-3.059
<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.001
<i>Decision</i>	Significant

The p-value of 0.001 indicates that the reduction in truancy behavior following the intervention is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. These findings provide empirical support for the conclusion that students' truancy behavior changed meaningfully after participating in group counseling using behavior contract techniques.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

From a behavioral counseling perspective, the observed reduction in truancy behavior can be understood as the outcome of explicit behavioral structuring and reinforcement embedded within the behavior contract technique. Behavior contracts are designed to clarify behavioral expectations, establish consistent monitoring mechanisms, and define agreed-upon consequences and reinforcement. These elements represent core principles of behavior modification theory, which emphasizes the role of structured reinforcement in shaping observable behavior (Kazdin, 1989; Skinner, 2014)

In the present study, students were actively involved in formulating behavior contracts that specified attendance-related commitments. This collaborative process likely enhanced students' sense of responsibility and ownership over behavioral change. Rather than relying on external punishment, the intervention encouraged self-regulation through negotiated agreements, a strategy that has been shown to increase compliance and behavioral consistency.

The group counseling format appears to have further amplified the effectiveness of the behavior contract technique. Group settings provide a social environment in which students can observe peers' commitments, receive constructive feedback, and experience social reinforcement. According to social learning theory, behavior change is influenced not only by direct reinforcement but also by modeling and peer interaction (Bandura,

1977b, 2010). This theoretical framework helps explain why meaningful behavioral change was observed within a relatively short intervention period.

The increased variability observed in posttest scores highlights the fact that behavioral change is not uniform across individuals. Differences in personal motivation, self-regulation capacity, and contextual support may influence how students respond to counseling interventions. Developmental psychology emphasizes that early adolescents vary widely in their readiness and capacity for behavioral change, which may account for the observed individual differences (Santrock, 2019).

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study are consistent with and extend previous research on truancy interventions. Prior studies have consistently demonstrated that truancy behavior is responsive to structured, goal-oriented interventions that emphasize accountability and reinforcement rather than punitive measures (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Maynard et al., 2012; Virtanen et al., 2023; Walters, 2025). The significant reduction in truancy observed in this study supports the argument that behavioral approaches can be effective when applied systematically within school settings.

Research focusing specifically on behavior contracts has reported positive outcomes in improving attendance, task completion, and compliance with school rules, particularly when contracts are implemented collaboratively between students and educators (Cooper et al., 2007; Gresham et al., 2001). The present study corroborates these findings by demonstrating that behavior contracts, when embedded within counseling services, can lead to measurable behavioral change even over a relatively short intervention period.

Compared with studies emphasizing individual counseling, the group-based approach employed in this study offers a complementary perspective. While individual counseling allows for personalized attention, group counseling introduces a social dimension that can strengthen behavioral commitment through peer accountability and shared norms (Corey, 2017; Gazda et al., 1967)). The observed reduction in truancy

behavior aligns with previous evidence suggesting that group counseling is particularly effective for addressing social and behavioral issues during adolescence (Wentzel, 2012).

Moreover, the findings resonate with school-based intervention studies highlighting the importance of early identification of at-risk students through systematic needs assessment (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012; M. Te Wang & Fredricks, 2014). By targeting students with high levels of truancy behavior, the present study demonstrates the value of preventive and selective interventions within comprehensive guidance and counseling programs.

Within the Indonesian educational context, the results support national literature emphasizing the strategic role of school counselors in addressing student behavioral problems through developmental and preventive services rather than disciplinary approaches (Prayitno & Amti, 2013; Yusuf, 2012) This study contributes to this body of literature by providing quantitative evidence from a school-based counseling intervention implemented in a real educational setting.

At the same time, the findings extend existing knowledge by illustrating how behavior contracts can be operationalized within group counseling settings in junior high schools—an area that has received relatively limited empirical attention, particularly in non-Western educational contexts.

### **Alternative Explanations and Critical Reflection**

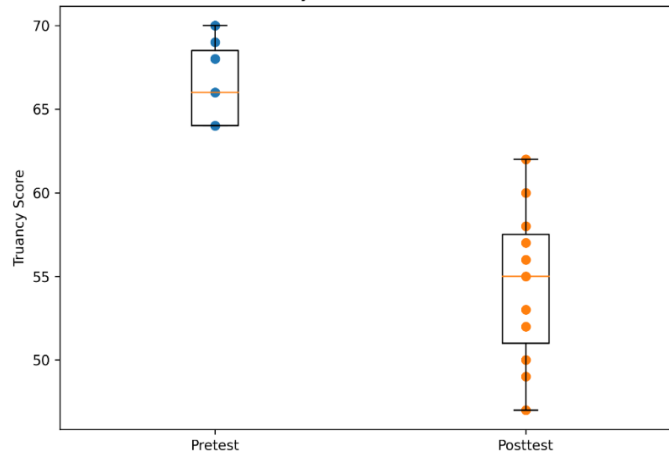
Although the results indicate a significant reduction in truancy behavior, alternative explanations should be considered. The observed changes may have been influenced by increased attention from teachers and counselors during the intervention period or by students' heightened awareness of being observed. External factors, such as parental involvement or situational changes in the school environment, may also have contributed to the improvements.

The absence of a control group limits the ability to attribute all observed changes exclusively to the intervention. However, the convergence between statistical findings, descriptive patterns, and theoretical expectations strengthens the plausibility that the

counseling intervention played a central role in the observed outcomes. A visual representation of score distribution further supports this interpretation.

**Figure 1.**

Distribution of Truancy Scores Before and After the Intervention



The figure illustrates a clear downward shift in truancy scores following the intervention, reinforcing the statistical evidence presented in Tables 3 and 5.

**Implications for Educational Guidance and Counseling**

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational guidance and counseling practice. First, they suggest that group counseling integrated with behavior contract techniques can serve as a practical and cost-effective intervention for addressing truancy behavior in junior high school settings. Second, the results highlight the importance of systematic needs assessment as a foundation for targeted counseling interventions. Third, the integration of behavioral techniques within counseling services supports a structured and proactive approach to student behavior management that aligns with the developmental needs of early adolescents.

**Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The pre-experimental one-group design restricts causal inference, and the small sample size limits generalizability. The relatively short duration of the intervention also precludes conclusions regarding the long-term sustainability of behavioral change.

Future research is encouraged to employ quasi-experimental or experimental designs with control groups and larger samples. Longitudinal studies could examine whether improvements in attendance behavior are maintained over time. Additionally, incorporating qualitative data may provide deeper insights into students' experiences and the mechanisms underlying behavioral change.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the effectiveness of group counseling services integrated with behavior contract techniques in reducing truancy behavior among junior high school students. The findings demonstrate a statistically significant reduction in students' truancy behavior following the intervention, as evidenced by the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test results ( $Z = -3.059$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). These results indicate that the counseling intervention successfully influenced students' attendance-related behavior.

The reduction in truancy behavior suggests that the integration of structured behavioral strategies within a group counseling framework provides a meaningful and effective approach to addressing attendance problems during early adolescence. By combining clear behavioral expectations, reinforcement mechanisms, and peer-based interaction, the intervention addressed truancy as a behavioral and social issue rather than merely a disciplinary concern.

Overall, the findings confirm that behavior contract-based group counseling is an effective school-based intervention for reducing truancy behavior and supports its application within junior high school guidance and counseling services, particularly in Islamic educational contexts.

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